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## TRISSINO, A POSSIBLE SOURCE FOR THE PLÉIADE

The influence of the Italian Renaissance critics upon the doctrines of the Pléiade, though indubitable, has been stated more often than it has been proved. So far almost the only source thoroughly worked out is Villey's demonstration of how Speroni is "conveyed" into the *Défense et illustration*; though Spingarn has suggested that the latter work is probably inspired in some respects by the *De Vulgari Eloquentia*.

A suggestion is all that the present note is designed to furnish. There will probably be a manifold answer to the question, How did the theories of the Italian *Artes Poeticae* first get over into the French? One possible link is given by Hauvette in his study of *Luigi Alamanni*;<sup>1</sup> a strong case is made out for that humanist, who resided in France, knew some of the Pléiade, and is mentioned in the *Défense*. Yet in poetical theory proper his name may carry less weight than that of Minturno, who certainly appears to have counted with the Pléiade, or than that of Trissino, who very probably did.

The case for Trissino is that he had translated the *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, which Du Bellay may have used, and that certain doctrines of the French school, especially as to diction and rhythm, bear a strong resemblance to the Italian's poetics.<sup>2</sup>

That work—*Le Sei Divisioni della Poetica*<sup>3</sup>—appeared in two sections: Parts I-IV in 1529; Parts V-VI in 1563. Trissino had already written the last two (which, critically, are the important parts) when—and if—he journeyed in France. Even if the *Défense* is ruled out of Trissino's field—so far as regards the influence of the last parts of the *Poetica*—there still remains his more plausible influence on Ronsard. Also there remains the general influence of the first parts, already published—and these are the parts concerned with diction. Incidentally, Trissino also wrote the first regular

<sup>1</sup> Paris, 1913.

<sup>2</sup> Spingarn, *Literary Criticism in the Renaissance*, (3d ed., 1912), p. 176, maintains that the critic traveled in France. But according to Morsolin, *Trissino* (1894), pp. 307-9ff., the journey of the critic's son is rather indicated. For this correction I am indebted to Mr. Ralph C. Williams, of Johns Hopkins University.

<sup>3</sup> The edition used is *Tutte le opere*, 2 vols., Verona, 1729.

classical Italian tragedy, *Sofonisba*; this was translated into French in 1553, thus helping to establish its author's repute, and it was imitated by Mairet in 1634.

To suggest a possible connection with the Pléiade, it will suffice here briefly to characterize and abstract the chief doctrines of the *Poetica*. It is the first of that title in Italian and it is typical of the doctrinaire movement, in that it aims at a vulgarization of Aristotle, shows little originality in criticism proper, and is full of unwise saws and ancient instances. Of the early parts, dealing with Tuscan philology and versification, we are scarcely concerned with any but the first. The objects and components of poetry are defined after Aristotle and Horace. Trissino touches the Pléiade in insisting on the charm of well-chosen words, in mentioning circumlocution, and especially in analyzing, as the sources of new diction, metaphors, dialect words, compound words, and something very like *provignement* or grafting. He says: "Il terzo modo è da una parola nota formare uno verbo, come è da *scoglio*, *inscoglia*, da *chioma*, *dischiomo*, e simili." Compare Ronsard's recommendation of forming verbs from an old root. Words should be selected for their clearness, grandeur, beauty, *costume* (*propriété*), etc. As to rhythm (Part II), he wishes it to be known that he, first of modern poets, uses it in the sense, not of rime, but of swing, measure. He also defines and analyzes the regular sonnet (Part IV).

The last two parts contain more theory, mainly as a paraphrase of Aristotle. On imitation,<sup>1</sup> tragedy, and the like, Trissino (though after Scaliger) sets the pace for the classical tradition. It may be noted that he and Du Bellay mention practically the same poetic *genres*.

More originality is shown in the parts dealing with the heroic poem and with comedy. Trissino's own experiment with the former (*L'Italia Liberata*) may be compared with Ronsard's, and there are certainly some analogies in theory. The former holds that the epic should narrate a single action, which distinguishes it from history. It has certain of the same divisions and qualities as tragedy, but it has no time-limit and its size is subject only to the artistic test of

<sup>1</sup> As to imitation, Trissino and not Daniello (as Spingarn claims, p. 28), is the first modern to revive the Aristotelian concept of ideal *mimesis*.

being considered and remembered as a whole. It may admit episodes. In form, the hexameter is the most admirable ancient verse, the hendecasyllable for the Italian. Blank verse (which he uses and elsewhere defends) is better than the monotony of Dante and Ariosto. Homer is most excellent in his impersonality. In dealing with tragedy, Trissino had mentioned "ammirazione" as a *ressort*, by the side of pity and fear, and now he stresses that quality as still more necessary in the epic; augmentative comparisons are excellent for this purpose. Homer, again, is strong on "bellissime menzogne" and paralogisms. The impossible is better than the improbable, or what offends verisimilitude. The otiose parts should be decorated, and that helps excuse the impossible, which may also be used for idealization or as part of the opinion of men (legend being considered, since Aristotle, as on a par with history for poetic material). Trissino speaks up for virtue, reproving Boccaccio's bad women. He submits the question as to which is the greater, tragedy or epic. He admits a certain vastness about the epic, not participating in the later dogmas about a time-period of one year and the like, but he blames Ariosto for writing in a mixed form. Around this point of unity and size there started a long discussion, in France as in Italy.

His treatment of comedy, though his theory of the ridiculous seems to have counted on Sidney and Hobbes in England, is apparently of less consequence for France. One may mention his analysis of the general *bassesse* of comedy, which, however, ridicules for virtue's sake. Joy is the note and there must be a joyful ending. The names of the characters should be invented, and there is more about "costumi" or sticking to your character.

The parts of Trissino that impress me as most suitable for investigation in connection with the Pléiade<sup>1</sup> are his theory of the epic and his views on the formation of words. To see the possibilities of the latter comparison, one need only glance at Lanson's summary<sup>2</sup> of the

<sup>1</sup> The subject is, I believe, being considered for a dissertation.

<sup>2</sup> *Hist. de la litt. fr.* (8th ed.), pp. 277-78. Another similarity: Professor Nitze suggests that both Trissino and Ronsard revive the same form of strophe in the ode. See Trissino, Part IV (Canzone di Ruggieri) and Ronsard (ed. Blanchemain), II, 41-42, 63-64, 105-6, 109-10. Cf. Marot, thirty-third psalm; Laumonier, *Ronsard, poète lyrique*, p. 693; Malherbe, Lamartine, Hugo, etc.

six sources defended by the Pléiade: the ancients, compound words, old French, dialect words, technical terms—and *provignement*. The similarity to Trissino's recommendations is striking. The task here, as in the more purely critical borderland, would be to strain away first all precepts common to the classical and Renaissance tradition, in whatever country, under whatever name.

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